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ABSTRACT

With Cooperative Extension Service (CES) help in a wide range of economic development activities rural America has come a long way in the last several decades toward erasing some of its socioeconomic problems. A survey of CES' Community and Rural Development programs conducted in late 1985 and early 1986 identified a variety of CES activities related to economic development. At least half of the 56 respondents had worked on community surveys, economic analysis, business management, retention and expansion, and market studies. The most common approach reported was individual counseling followed by workshops and agent training. Specific CES programs in economic development include Ohio's retention and expansion program, Montana's programs to deal with declining agricultural revenue, Washington's community surveys to obtain information for an economic development plan, and Georgia's computer-generated reports of county demography and economic status. CES is on the right track with its economic development programs, but challenges remain. Given the common needs of states, work at the regional level should be continued and expanded. Extension's different programs (home economics, farm management, and community economic development) should join forces to tackle economic problems and should be concerned with agriculture, the service sector, traditional and nonmanufacturing industry, and small business. (JHZ)

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# THE ROLE OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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# THE ROLE OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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The purpose of this paper is to tell what the role of the Cooperative Extension Service is, has been, and can be in economic development. My comments are based on three sources of information. First, I have reviewed histories, policy recommendations, syntheses, and overviews of extension's activities in economic development. Second, I conducted a national survey of extension programs in economic development at the end of 1985. The data from that survey provide a consistent, although somewhat superficial, view of the role of the Cooperative Extension Service in economic development nationwide. Third, I have more detailed knowledge of particular States' programs, which I shall use to illustrate extension's role in economic development.

I begin the paper with a brief historical overview of the Cooperative Extension Service and how it became involved in economic development. Next I present some findings from the nationwide survey I conducted. I then present some examples of programs that are currently in place to show the kinds of work extension is doing and how it goes about its work. Finally, I shall talk about high priority challenges facing the extension service in economic development.

For purposes of this discussion, economic development is defined as "increasing the community's economic base, expanding job opportunities, increasing per capita incomes and the output of goods and services" (ECOP,

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1978,. Economic development includes industrial development, agricultural development, employment of natural resources and development of the trade and service sectors (ECOP, 1978) as well as growth management, downtown revitalization, "manpower" development, small business development and other emphases (ECOP, 1983).

## History and Overview of Extension

Cooperative Extension traces its roots to the latter half of the nineteenth century. Most accounts begin with the Morrill Land Grant College Act (1862), signed by President Lincoln, establishing a system of land grant colleges and universities for "teaching of agriculture and the mechanical arts." In the same year the U.S. Department of Agriculture was established. In 1877 Congress passed the Hatch Act, which led to the creation of Agricultural Experiment Stations at land-grant institutions. In 1890 a second Morrill Act was passed, adding sixteen historically black educational institutions and Tuskegee Institute to the land-grant system. In 1914 Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act, which created Cooperative Extension as a partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the land-grant educational institutions. The purpose of the partnership was to facilitate the "diffusion among the people of the United States useful and practical information" on agriculture and home economics. Before 1914 the U.S. Department of Agriculture and some States had recognized the need for an outreach function. Prior to establishment of the Cooperative Extension System, U.S. Department of Agriculture field people performed the extension function. From the

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beginning, Cooperative Extension played a part in rural development. However, not until 1956 did Congress amend the Smith-Lever Act to make rural development an official function of Cooperative Extension.[1]

Over the years the scope of Cooperative Extension activities has increased in the rural development arena in response to legislation and policy shifts.[2] A key example of the broad mandate given to Extension to engage in rural development activities is Title V (Small Farms and Rural Development Research and Extension) of the Rural Development Act of 1972 authorizing Extension "to encourage and foster a balanced National development that provides opportunities to increased numbers of Americans to work and enjoy a high quality of life... by providing the essential knowledge necessary for successful programs of rural development."[3] In 1980 the Rural Development Policy Act further defined the mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in developing intergovernmental programs in rural development.

Today Extension operates in over 3,000 counties across the United States. In each State county extension staffs--with support of their counties, State specialists located at the land grant universities, and National program leaders in the Extension Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, DC--provide educational programs. Its "role in community development is education. It does not make nor carry out plans for people but rather helps people to better plan and carry out their own community development effort" (Phifer and List, p. 30).

Admittedly, Extension's resources devoted to community and rural development--let alone economic development--are small in comparison to resources devoted to its other major program areas (agriculture and natural resources, home economics, and 4-H/youth). Of 16,002 total staff years expended by State Cooperative Extension Services in 1984 for all program areas (measured in terms of full-time equivalent employees), only 1,008--or 6.3 percent--were spent in the Community and Rural Development (CRD) program area.[4] In interpreting the importance of this statement for economic development, one needs to recognize that CRD includes local government, natural resources policy, and other components besides economic development. By the same token, much of the work of the other three program areas within extension is clearly related to economic development. For instance, extension home economists have a great deal of experience assisting homemakers to start, manage, and market home-based crafts businesses. The farm management and marketing programs of the agriculture program area obviously contribute to the income, well-being, and economic stability of rural communities. The 4-H career programs for youth also contribute to economic development. In short, it would be misleading to suggest that all of Extension's work in economic development falls under the CRD category. By one (conservative) estimate, only about one percent of total Extension resources is allocated to economic development (Morse and others, 1983).

## Current Extension Work in Economic Development

In December 1985 I sent a survey (Appendix I) to each State's (plus Guam, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico) CRD leader and to each CRD program leader at

the 1890 institutions plus Tuskeegee Institute. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain the scope of Cooperative Extension Service (CES) work related to economic development and the kinds of activities (workshops, individual counseling, newsletters, and so forth) extension was performing in the economic development arena.[5] The period I inquired about was July 1983-December 1985. The format for the survey (including selection of the subject matter and activity categories) was devised in consultation with four State CRD leaders.

I did a follow-up mailing in February 1986 and made follow-up phone calls in late February and early March 1986. If I could not reach a respondent on repeated phone calls I sent another mailing in early March 1986. As of March 13, I had received the 56 responses reported on here.

TABLE 1 summarizes the survey results. The survey instrument proved to be generally applicable in the sense that few respondents used the "other" column. In other words, in designing the survey we had identified the major categories of economic development subjects and activities.

Economic Analysis

A majority (35) of respondents indicated that their program did work in economic analysis. This is a broad category, which includes such things as economic base studies, impact analyses, trade area analyses, and so forth. The State CES's claim to the performing a wide range of activities

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF CRD PROGRAMS IN EXTENSION REPORTING ACTIVITIES
IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BY TYPE OF ACTIVITY
(JULY 1983-1985)

| Subject Matter Category | CRD Programs Reporting Activities in particular subject matter areas | Type of Activity | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Workshops or Seminars | Individual Counseling | Newsletter(s) | Media/Materials (Publications, Videotapes, Slide Sets, etc.) | Agent Training |
| Economic Analysis | 35 | 28 | 30 | 11 | 21 | 18 |
| Business Management | 32 | 30 | 26 | 12 | 15 | 17 |
| Retention and Expansion/Visitation | 29 | 18 | 24 | 5 | 9 | 12 |
| Community Surveys | 39 | 22 | 28 | 5 | 14 | 24 |
| Market Studies | 28 | 11 | 21 | 3 | 10 | 9 |
| Downtown Appearance/ Renovation | 26 | 18 | 18 | 6 | 11 | 15 |
| Historic Preservation | 15 | 7 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| "Manpower"/Employment | 19 | 15 | 12 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| TOTAL n=56 | | 149 | 171 | 46 | 87 | 106 |

Source: Survey conducted by Beth Walter Honadle, December 1985

contributing to economic analysis. These activities vary considerably from State to State, but (using the categories of activities identified in the survey) 21 States are engaged in at least three different types of activity related to economic analysis for economic development. The most common responses were that the respondent's program provides individual counseling (30 responses) and/or had put on one or more workshops or seminars on the subject (28 responses). Twenty-one responded that their programs had developed media materials (publications, videotapes, etc.) for economic analysis, eighteen had conducted training for extension agents on economic analysis; and eleven had newsletters that contributed to economic analysis.

Business Management

Most respondents (32) indicated that their programs were doing some work in business management. The focus of much of Extension's CRD work in business management is on "small" (variously defined) businesses. Bear in mind that this survey went to CRD program leaders. Hence, it did not capture any of the farm management work performed by Extension's agricultural programs nor did it collect any information about home economics programs directed toward home-based businesses.

The most common activity reported for business management was workshops (30 programs reported), followed by individual counseling (26). Seventeen programs had trained agents in business management, fifteen had developed media/materials, and twelve published newsletters that addressed business

management issues. Although I did not ask about this in my questionnaire, I assume that at least some of the newsletters reported may be multipurpose. In other words, business management may not be the only topic covered in the newsletter.

Business Retention and Expansion

Twenty-nine programs reported activities directed at expanding and retaining existing businesses in a community as opposed to seeking new industry to locate in the community. When I asked the question, I labelled it "business retention/expansion (R&E) and visitation" programs because a major component of R&E programs is local teams of volunteers who pay visits to existing business in the community to offer support and to foster good working relations with area businesses. The hope is that this will help communities avoid business closures by identifying concerns of local business owners at an early stage and by creating a climate of cooperation between businesses and the community.

The most common response to the question about R&E is that the programs involved individual counseling (24 programs), followed by eighteen programs that have put on R&E workshops. Twelve States have trained agents in R&E, nine have developed media/materials, and five publish newsletters that have disseminated information about R&E.

Community Surveys

One way in which Extension can assist communities to address their economic development problems is with community surveys. This general term may include surveys developed by a community with assistance by Extension agents and distributed by volunteers (e.g., scouts), by local economic development organizations, or with utility bills, for example. The purpose of the survey is to learn about community concerns, including those of the business community. The Extension Service may also help with the analysis and the presentation of the results to community leaders or the community at large. The more decisionmakers know about what individuals and businesses think about their community the better able they are to develop policies to make the communities more attractive locations for businesses and residence.

Thirty-nine respondents indicated work on community surveys. Twenty-eight reported that their programs provided individual counseling, twenty-four had trained extension agents, twenty-two had put on workshops on community surveys, fourteen had produced media/materials on or for community surveys and five had published newsletters with information on community surveys.

Market Studies

Twenty-eight respondents cited activities directed toward market studies. Most of the activities related to market studies involved individual counseling (21 responses). Eleven respondents indicated that their programs

included workshops and ten had produced media/materials. Nine States have trained agents on market studies and three report newsletters that provide information on market studies.

Downtown Appearance and Historic Preservation

I included downtown appearance/renovation and historic preservation within economic development because the way a downtown looks affects consumers' decisions to shop in the downtown area as well as the decisions of outside businesses considering locating there. Moreover, tax policy has been used to stimulate business investment in historic preservation. Another reason for including downtown appearance and historic preservation in the questionnaire was that I knew that some State CES's viewed work in these two areas as part of their economic development efforts. Thus, it seemed appropriate to collect information on downtown appearance/renovation and historic preservation in the economic development survey. I treated these two categories separately in the questionnaire and TABLE 1 reflects this. However, I have chosen to combine the discussion on them because they are closely related.

Twenty-six respondents reported activities in downtown appearance and renovation compared to fifteen reporting historic preservation activities. Fourteen of the fifteen programs having activities in historic preservation also reported downtown appearance/renovation work. This suggests that some CES's view historic preservation as a special type of downtown appearance/renovation effort.

The most common types of activity reported for downtown appearance/renovation were workshops and individual counseling (18 responses each) and agent training (15 responses). Eleven programs have made available media/materials on downtown appearance and six report that they have newsletters that deal with downtown appearance/renovation.

The most common form of historic preservation work CES's do is individual counseling (12 programs). Roughly half (7) of the programs reporting any work in historic preservation have provided workshops or seminars treating this topic. Relatively few programs conduct agent training (3), provide media/materials (2), or newsletters (1) in support of historic preservation.

"Manpower" Programs

Nineteen respondents reported "manpower" (jobs, labor) work. Workshops and individual counseling account for the bulk of the activities in this category (with 15 and 12 responses respectively). Eight programs have trained agents on "manpower" issues, five have developed media/materials and three have newsletters that have dealt with "manpower."

To summarize, the Cooperative Extension Service is engaged in a variety of educational activities related to economic development. The most common approach reported was individual counseling. The next most common approach cited was workshops or seminars followed by agent training. Media/materials

and newsletters are also widely used for economic development programming, but much less than the other three techniques mentioned.

At least half the respondents reported activities on community surveys, economic analysis, business management, retention and expansion, and market studies. Although fewer than half the respondents reported activities in the other areas covered by the survey (downtown appearance/renovation, historic preservation, and manpower programs), no less than 27 percent of the respondents cited work in any of those areas.

## Highlights of Selected Programs

So far I have discussed the level of resources Extension devotes to economic development programming and gave an overview of Extension activities on economic development nationwide. Now I would like to go into a little more depth on some specific programs Extension has in economic development.

### Ohio's Retention and Expansion Program

George Morse, a community resource economist with the Cooperative Extension Service in Ohio, has been a real leader in the R&E field. In the January 1986 issue of Economic Development notes, published by CES at Ohio State University, Dr. Morse gave the annual report on Ohio CES's R&E activities in 1985. These activities included publication of seven newsletters on specific topics of interest to those engaged in R&E work; a national R&E conference (which I participated in, incidentally), which drew 81 participants from 25

States and covered alternative approaches to R&E; the publication of a bulletin, "Retention and Expansion Business Visits," based on the experiences of 33 Ohio communities and designed to help others strengthen their R&E visitation programs; an economic development teleconferencing series; four pilot projects with business visitation teams in Ohio communities; publication of a fact sheet for local R&E teams to give to firms during their visits; and development of an "R&E self-assessment guide" to help existing business visitation programs improve their performance. All of this work, of course, draws on research conducted by faculty/extension staff at Ohio State University.

Montana CES and Economic Development

Economic development is becoming increasingly important in Montana (and other western States), due to declining timber, mining and agricultural industries. Montana Cooperative Extension, through its community development (CD) programs, is providing a variety of economic development educational services with a minimum of resources. Montana CES has one State Specialist in CD and a half-time CD-small business position. In FY 1985, only .6 FTE of county agent time was spent on economic development programming. Indirectly, of course, some of the other work Montana Extension performed in CD (e.g., community facilities) contributed to economic development.

Despite this resource scarcity for programming, Montana held two workshops in 1985 to help community leaders deal with the socioeconomic effects of

declining agricultural revenues. The workshops featured presenters from a diverse cross-section of extension specialists in CD, family life, farm management, public policy, family finances, and small business. Seventy-five participants from ten Montana counties attended the workshops.

Other activities included preparation of a slide/tape program on economic development strategies, a small business workshop, and obtaining and showing video cassettes on "Main Street" in six communities.

Washington State Community Survey

An example of how Extension gets involved in community surveys for economic development is provided by a 1985 survey of the Lower Columbia Economic Development Area (the Wahkiakum-Naselle School District). This fourteen page survey ("Logging-Farming-Fishing: Where Do We Go From Here?"), co-sponsored by Washington State University Cooperative Extension and the Lower Columbia Economic Development Council (LCEDC) is being used in preparing an economic development action plan. It was addressed to "an adult in your household" and asked respondents to rank their preferences for a variety of possible economic development goals, to rate a number of area services, and to indicate where they shop for various consumer goods and services. The responses to those and other questions in the survey were to be mailed back to the Cooperative Extension Service. Respondents were assured that LCEDC staff and community leaders would consider their responses.

You may be wondering how valuable CES services are to their clients. A letter dated November 15, 1985 from the Special Projects Manager employed by Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Governmental Conference to the Washington CES State CRD leader reads, in part:

> "I would like to thank the Washington State University [CES] for the excellent technical information, data processing and data, and for the many hours of valuable assistance provided to the [LCEDC] and to Wahkiakum County in preparing the Wahkiakum County Overall Economic Development Plan (OEDP)....
>
> "The excellent support provided by [Washington CES] made possible one of the best quality data bases for economic development planning... which I have seen in 15 years of working with communities of all sizes."

Georgia's Economic Analyses

Georgia's Cooperative Extension Service has provided computer-generated reports on "Demographics, Human Resources, and Economic Conditions" for county

decisionmakers. These reports, which run about 20-25 pages in length, begin with the following foreword:

> "This report provides a valuable tool for the citizens of [your] County. Decisions relating to any development policy must be based upon the best available information. People and firms looking to locate in communities want current information of the type found in this report. By looking at the data contained in this document and comparing [your] County to the U.S. and State averages, one gets an idea of what [your] County's future looks like."

Contained in the report are graphs, charts, maps and brief text giving information on the individual county's population trends and projecting personal income trends, transfer payments from Georgia and the Federal Government, poverty levels, numbers of firms, and the area's labor force. The report even tells the reader how the statistics contained in the report may be applied by a variety of users.

## Challenges and Future Directions

The preceding sections have focused on the historical and current roles of the Cooperative Extension Service in economic development. I would like to end by

briefly discussing current challenges[6] and possible directions CES economic development programming may take.

The issue of current challenges is addressed in part by respondents' answers to the optional question on page 2 of the survey I conducted (see Appendix I). Forty of the fifty-six respondents filled in this question. I asked respondents to list the top three economic development priorities for CRD/CES in their respective States.

Because this was an open-ended question, I cannot tabulate precisely the number of programs citing a given priority. However, I did find twenty-two respondents who listed small business management, development, and/or productivity improvement among the top three priorities for their program. Sixteen mentioned retention and expansion of existing business as a high priority activity. Downtown revitalization (mentioned by 8), economic analysis (7), and "manpower" development/employment programs (7) are also cited frequently. Among the other priority areas identified by the survey are the identification of alternative opportunities for economic development, help for small farmers and/or natural resources business, tourism, starting businesses, community surveys, and attracting new businesses.

Given the commonality of interest among States noted above and the relative scarcity of CES resources available for economic development (and the slim chances of this situation improving in the forseeable future), I predict more activity on a regional basis. In the early 1970s four Regional Rural

Development Centers were established to encourage and implement programs to improve the social and economic health of rural communities within their regions. They are currently located at Oregon State University, Iowa State University, Pennsylvania State University, and Mississippi State University for the Western, North Central, Northeastern and Southern regions, respectively. By supporting economic development programs of interest to two or more States, the Centers provide opportunities for extension specialists to travel out of State to develop programs, make presentations at workshops and to provide technical assistance, reaching even more communities than Extension already does.

Second, extension's different program thrusts should join forces to tackle community problems. We already see this happening in some cases as extension does its part to deal with the farm financial crisis. Home economists, farm management specialists, and community economic development specialists can and should blend their skills and experiences to provide comprehensive assistance to distressed rural communities and to farm families trying to cope with the stresses associated with the "farm crisis."

The Budget Subcommittee of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy as recently as February 1986 identified "Revitalizing Rural America" as one of its priorities for the Cooperative Extension System. According to the committee's report:

> "The survival of rural America, both the farms and smaller communities, is dependent upon the expansion of income and employment opportunities in rural areas....A strong agriculture relies on strong rural communities. Conversely, the fact cannot be overlooked that rural communities require and depend on a strong agriculture" (ECOP, 1986, p.6).

Recognizing the interdependencies between agriculture and rural communities is critical for rural development.[7] In fact, rural communities need to take advantage of all of the natural resource opportunities at their disposal, including forestry, mining, tourism and recreation, fishing, and farming. Communities should explore ways of adding value locally to their natural resources in order to retain more of the income potential of those assets in the geographic areas possessing the resources--the rural areas.

Traditionally, economic development programs for rural communities have focused almost exclusively on manufacturing industry. Today, however, there is increasing recognition of the important role that services and retail trade play in economic development. While service sector development must be pursued in tandem with traditional industrial development, a focus on nonmanufacturing industry is appropriate.

For a variety of reasons, there is a current surge in what is being called entrepreneurship--starting new businesses. Extension can play (and is playing) an important role in helping entrepreneurs make sound decisions and manage their businesses appropriately. For some, a new business is the aftermath of a failure in some other business, such as farming. For others, entrepreneurship means starting a business in order to generate off-farm income. Or, it may be a home-based business--a consulting firm, a business services company, or one of the many other kinds of businesses that may be conducted in the home. Extension needs to examine the importance of entrepreneurs to their communities and to provide educational assistance when possible.

In closing, Extension has contributed a lot to economic development of rural and small communities. Its current activities in economic development cover a wide range of areas from small business management to economic analyses. Extension professionals employ a variety of tools, including workshops, multimedia materials, individual counseling, and agent training to reach its target audiences. Rural America has come a long way in the last several decades in erasing some of the socioeconomic disparities distinguishing it from some of the more advantaged parts of urban America. But challenges remain. I think that Extension is on the right track with its economic development programs. However, as Will Rogers once said, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." Extension is <u>not</u> just sitting there. Extension <u>is</u> moving forward and it will require concerted effort of its sometimes independent program thrusts to meet the challenges it faces.

## NOTES

[1]For a fairly detailed historical overview of rural development programs in the United States, see Rasmussen (1985). See also: Nelson (1980) and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Federal Extension Service (no date).

[2]A good review of enabling legislation and policy for Cooperative Extension's economic development programs is found in ECOP (1978), pp. 5-6.

[3]As quoted in ECOP (1978), p. 6.

[4]According to data compiled by the Program Development Evaluation and Management Systems (PDEMS) staff of the Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

[5]There have been other attempts to summarize Extension's work in the area of economic development. In 1981, two issues of the Extension Service's CRD Newsletter [U.S. Department of Agriculture, Extension Service (July 1981) and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Extension Service (August 1981)] examined small business management and economic development (in general) programs respectively. See also Morse and others (1983).

[6]For an essay urging Extension to employ the concept of "strategic futures" in its programming, see Lovan (1986). He argues that Extension should take risks by recognizing and exploiting opportunities.

[7]Minnesota's Experiment Station director recently wrote, "Extension has a very long history of helping farmers with technical agricultural issues...I'd suggest the Extension Service could play a broadened and expanded role in coordinating and stimulating new small business development in rural areas, thereby helping both farmers and rural communities at the same time" (Sauer, 1985).

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APPENDIX I

## INSTRUCTIONS

Mark boxes (X) to indicate what ACTIVITIES your State CES has provided in a variety of ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBJECT MATTER AREAS. Limit your responses to only those ACTIVITIES completed during or after July 1983 (last 2 1/2 years). Second, give the name and phone number of a contact person who may be called for information about the activity or the subject. Third, refer to the NARS plan of work number corresponding to the activity. Example: If your State CES has formally trained agents in business management techniques between July 1, 1983 and the present (1) mark an X in the box to the right of business management and below agent training, (2) give the name and phone number of an individual who could give further information on the program, and (3) give the NARS plan of work number corresponding to the activity.

Feel free to add additional categories of activities. The ones included here are general and are intended to cover most State economic development programs.

The second page is optional. I would appreciate your filling it in, however. It will help me identify critical areas for economic development programs.

Return both sheets to me by January 24, 1986 in the envelope provided for your convenience. Thank you.

Name _____
Title _____
State _____
Phone _____

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBJECT MATTER AREAS

| | ACTIVITIES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Workshop/ Seminars | Individual Counseling | Newsletters | Media/ Materials (publications, video tapes etc.) | Agent Training | Other (Specify) |
| Economic Analysis | | | | | | |
| Business Management | | | | | | |
| Business Retention/ Expansion/ Visitation | | | | | | |
| Community Surveys (e.g., Community Concerns) | | | | | | |
| Market Studies (e.g., Consumer, Merchant Surveys) | | | | | | |
| Downtown Appearance/ Renovation | | | | | | |
| Historic Preservation | | | | | | |
| Labor "Manpower" Development | | | | | | |
| Other (Specify) | | | | | | |

List, in priority order (1 = highest priority), the top three economic development priorities for CRD programming in your State.

(1)

(2)

(3)

What method did you use to identify these priorities? (e.g., recent survey, a staff retreat, personal view of the situation)

Any other comments, suggestions for programming (e.g., training needs) or questions will be appreciated: